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ABSTRACT

How educators teach and talk about the Puritans tends to promulgate a view of them that does not exist in all their texts. From the beginning of the Puritans' arrival in 1630 in New England until Cotton Mather's 1702 publication "Magnalia Christi Americana," there are literary treatments of the idealism and the hardship constituting Puritan life that are surprisingly "antisocial," that are critical of the normative community. This is especially true of the uniquely American genre, the captivity narrative--specifically that written by early New England women. "Having students see these captivity narratives as socially challenging entails having them consider these women writers as acting like today's queer performers, if not like today's transvestites, when they create the 'American hero.'" One instructor who teaches the captivity narrative begins, as follows: (1) notes that English 290 class starts with a showing of "The Last of the Mohicans," which allows students to start the course reading while helping them agree on a present-day representation of the American hero; (2) has students bring in pictures of those who dress as "the other sex," preparing them to: (3) discusses the differences between transvestitism and cross-dressing; and (4) reads "very brief" sections of a psychiatric manual describing "transvestic fetishism." Next they read the Puritan Mary Rowlandson's 1676 "Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration" and the Quaker Elizabeth Hanson's 1724 account of her captivity. With this approach students become better informed about early American women and Native Americans and their role in making a country. "They also see the interconnections among the supposedly antisocial, such as the queer, the transvestite, the cross-dresser, and the heterosexist American hero." Students come to see how accepted norms are often at odds with what society purports to value. (Contains 11 notes.) (NKA)

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ED 406 693

J. F. Buckley

Teaching the Puritan Captivity Narrative:

A History of the American Hero

It rarely fails. The first day of English 290 at The Ohio State University-Mansfield (Colonial and U.S. Literature to 1865). Greeting a section I call "Puritan Literature" are a lot of quizzical looks, a few pained expressions, and even, once in a while, from the more well-read, recent high-school graduate, some occasional grousing. "They were all so boring," and "There was no individuality," are often the apparently unanimous sentiments. Those few students who have been taught some Puritan literature apparently agree with the majority who have but heard about these early settlers. Why? Because, I believe, how we teach and how we talk about the Puritans tend to promulgate a view of them that does not exist in all their texts.

In truth, from the time of John Winthrop's arrival on the *Arbella* in 1630 to Cotton Mather's 1702 publication of *Magnalia Christi Americana,* there are literary treatments of the idealism and the hardship constituting Puritan life that are surprisingly "antisocial," that are critical of the normative community. Especially is this so with the uniquely American genre, the captivity narrative--and specifically the narrative of capture written by early New England women. These women

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go so far as to create the lone American individual who heroically wanders a "natural" world outside of and in a reaction to the white, Eurocentric patriarchy,[1] the lone American individual who later comes to reflect "so resonantly masculine a voice."[2]

Having students see the early woman's captivity narrative as antisocial, as socially challenging, entails having them consider these New England women writers as acting like today's queer performers, if not like today's transvestites, when they create "the American hero." To accomplish this, I start teaching the Puritan captivity narrative as follows:

1. Note that my English 290 class starts with a showing of Twentieth Century Fox's 1992 version of *The Last of the Mohicans.* This allows students to start their course reading while helping them agree on a present-day representation of the American hero.

2. I have students bring in pictures of those who dress as "the other sex," or in "what signifies the other sex" in today's America. This works well as a research assignment because photos of cross-dressers and transvestites are not generally readily available in popular magazines, forcing students to use the Web along with such library tools as InfoTrac.

And they almost always bring to class the most outrageous example, the person easily seen as playing two gender roles.

3. This leads nicely to a discussion of the differences between transvestism and cross-dressing, and between "passing" and acting queer. The political differences, for example, become quite clear when, say, students see a picture of the cross-dresser who parades the East Village in dress and high heels while still wearing a beard.

4. We now read very brief sections of the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV,* which describes "transvestic fetishism" as a paraphiliac desire of a, generally male, cross-dressing subject for the object he creates by putting on the objects, actions, and situations of the woman in ways that correct anxiety and contribute to a sense of calm.[3] I am here establishing that society devalues the person who takes on objects, actions, situations of "the other," and I am establishing that society needs to encode all "its" selves.

Now I return to American literature and "the earliest full-length account to be published as a book . . . contain[ing] all the structural elements that eventually characterized the captivity narrative": *The Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration,* written by a woman, Mary

Rowlandson.[4] After reading the orthodox Puritan Mary Rowlandson's account of her 1676 captivity, we read the unregenerate Puritan Hannah Dustan's account of her 1697 captivity , then the pacifist Quaker Elizabeth Hanson's account of her 1724 captivity.[5] These provide students not only with a representative view of the Puritan woman's captivity narrative from its beginning to what is considered its last appearance. Students also see how this captive woman uses the "Indian." Rowlandson, Dustan, and Hanson, writing in the face of patriarchal pressures, pressures that still exist, present a performance of self unlike male authors such as the well-known Quentin Stockwell and John Williams. Although all captives saw "the ideals of [their] civilization" theologically and socially challenged by the Indian,[6] the Puritan woman articulates her plight via the secular, the bodily, the Indian, the female. What she embodies is a new idealized self.[7]

My point is to emphasize that the Puritan woman's narrative of captivity is an acting out of the antisocial, the Indian. This early woman "radically and explicitly" performs her perception of her self in socially challenging ways.[8] For example, in The Second Remove, Rowlandson may attribute her life to "the wonderful power of God," but she makes it clear

that she and the Indians arise and travel on "having no Christian . . . to comfort or help," having no comfort, in fact, save "a little fire, and a few boughs behind" her (R 327). She travels as does James Fenimore Cooper's Hawkeye.[9] (Or rather Hawkeye will travel as does she.) When the Indians plunder various objects in order to survive, Rowlandson uses what has passed through their hands to philosophize her situation and bolster her orthodox Puritanism: "One of the Indians . . . brought some plunder . . . and asked me if I would have a Bible . . . . I was glad of it" (R 330). The Calvinist society's normative touchstone, the Bible, first becomes Indian "plunder." In fact, only as Indianized pillage does Rowlandson have access to it. With it she spiritualizes, validates, emphasizes what is Indian. Not only does she philosophize; she obtains reasoning and justification for biding her time, for not attempting escape: *"Wait on the Lord"* (331). She reasons as does Hawkeye when he plans that Cora and Alice be captured; however, unlike Hawkeye who slips downstream to safety, Rowlandson thinks as the self-sufficient hero from <u>within</u> the dangers of her captivity--acts the more heroic.

The Indianized Bible further allows Rowlandson to condemn "the English" who fail to cross the Baquag River, as do the Indians with "old and young, some sick, and some lame": *"Oh, that my people had hearkened*

to me, . . . I should soon have subdued their enemies" (334). However, the Indian whom Rowlandson values "subdues" the normative English by using antisocial nature, by plunging deeper into anti-Calvinist wilderness. When she later cites Proverbs 27:7, calling raw horse liver *"sweet"* as she eats "with the blood about [her] mouth" (335), she is obviously hungry. Yet it cannot be ignored that she esteems the Indian object. Instead of calling on her Calvinist God for spiritual solace, she spiritualizes the lowly object that solaces her body.

At this point I again have my class bring in pictures. It is important that students, not I, provide such proof because it establishes the general applicability of my assertion that the self is signified, can be resignified, and is always performed. (Although the teacher must, of course, be prepared.) For example, in the past I have asked that students bring in "pictures of AIDS," forcing them to interpret my request. Without fail this meant pictures of young men, often men in such "gay AIDS organizations as ACT-UP." Students generally look first in the most familiar magazines; so, our culture's most prevalent normal signifiers of selfhood are easily found and their cultural currency confirmed.

We discuss how images of sexuality change, or are re-coded for various reasons in various situations. The cross-dresser or transvestite

seen as "sick" by *DSM IV* easily becomes the "cause" of another disease: AIDS. The Bible, seen as Calvinism's source of normative validation, easily becomes a validation of the antisocial. All this becoming depends on how we all "act."

As a class we discuss how and why all these resignifications have both positive and negative values depending on which community's norms validate and idealize the self doing the valuing.

I now come back to American literature. Rowlandson's use of Indian objects obviously means engaging in Indian activities. Upon returning to her community and family, she invokes the Calvinist ideal of chastity to establish herself as still deserving of membership in the white community:

> I have been in the midst of those roaring lions, and savage bears, that feared neither God, nor man, nor the devil, by night and day, alone and in company: sleeping all sorts together, and yet not one of them ever offered me the least abuse of unchastity to me, in word or action. (R 361)

For all her Puritanism Rowlandson is espousing what are and have long been the values of the Native American. Warriors, especially in seventeenth-century New England, before corruption by the white man's

methods of war, almost never raped female captives. They often adopted them instead into their families, and never violated the incest taboo. While rape of female captives became more an actuality in the later nineteenth century in southwestern United States, hence more a literary norm in captivity narratives from that time and place, it is unrecorded in the time of Rowlandson (Derounian-Stodola 3-4, 125-130).

Although Dustan, as Mather reports, is not so long a captive as is Rowlandson, she too encodes new signifiers for her self, performs, with the aid of Indian objects and activities, a new individuality. On April 30, before she reaches the Indian town where she would be "stript, and scourg'd," Dustan convinces her nurse, and an English youth captured from Worcester, to join her in escaping. She violently determines her own destiny, her own new identity: "furnishing themselves with hatchets for the purpose, they struck such home [sic] blows upon the heads of their sleeping oppressors, that" they killed ten whom they also then scalped (*MCA* 636). Dustan, like Hawkeye, is capable of wielding Indian weapons, is, like Hawkeye, a solitary hero when she defines her own resistance and her own, new self through individual action. Mather tries to downplay this individualism as being like the biblical Jael who cannot meet Sisera equally in open combat and so must resort to cunning and what is supposed

to be a woman's weapon: a tent peg. Dustan, however, empowers her self with the male's weapon, while the Indian acts in a manner similar to how the white woman is pictured at the start of captivity narratives: "at their feet they bow'd, they fell; where they bow'd, there they fell down dead" (*MCA* 636). By next using an Indian knife to scalp, Dustan completes her usurpation of the patriarchal domains of both the male Indian and the male Puritan who deal in scalps for money and for political suasion. As a consequence, Dustan is rewarded with individuation and material gain. Like Hawkeye, the heroic American male who will follow in her footsteps, she is the lone agent valorized by the community whose norms she ostensibly rejects in fighting for those norms.

Hanson, like Rowlandson, does not so directly effect her escape with Indian objects and actions, but there is nonetheless a performance of a new self. She finds empowering an individuating mode of action wherein her own body acts both naturally and Indian: "traveling very hard . . . through sundry rivers, brooks, and swamps," when all about her are seeking food, when all the Indians and captives are at the mercy of nature and the luck of the hunt, she actually creates, without a male, through her own body, the ability to nurture new life. In a natural community of Indian women that she unites around her breasts, Hanson embodies an identity

that resists not only the elements of the natural world which threaten her and her child. She enacts a self who is resilient to the male Indian "master" who would have her believe he will kill her child. Even in the Anglophile community where she might be expected to explain what uses the other, the Indian, has made or might have made of her body--as Rowlandson must do--no male appears to have power over Hanson. In fact, no male dares presume to excuse her actions--as Mather does with Dustan. Instead, Hanson discusses her Indianized body and its efficacy in the self-confident, individualistic style of the natural woman acting the Indian, a voice Hawkeye will echo when telling other whites of his natural power and ability.

At this point, using clips of videos I rent and preset to start at a specific scene, I have my class compare the self performed by these three women in their writing to the sexist images of women in western and action films. We discuss, for example, why Dirty Harry leads his female colleague by the hand when they are being fired at, even though she eventually saves his life by sacrificing her own. We discuss, for example, how and why Shane is the outdoor, natural, stoic hero while the woman who cooks, cleans, and frets looks at him and is looked at by him through a window framed by another man--her husband.

Not only do students easily see that these early Puritan women are performing an alternative to such feminized roles; they notice how later-day writers have coopted that self for the male.

But of equal value to reconsidering the captivity narrative, students also see that those outrageous cross-dressers whose pictures they earlier brought to class occupy, through their performances, a role both social and antisocial, like "our American hero." Both combine in socially challenging ways, the normal and the abnormal--that is the new self.

Returning to Puritan literature, we note that not only are Indian objects and activities part of the woman's originating performance of the American hero. She also uses the situations of the Indian. Rowlandson lists at the close of her narrative five instances where Native Americans, in a hopeless situation, espouse more clearly than British or Puritans that which she most idealizes:

> I cannot but remember how the Indians derided the slowness, and dullness of the English army . . . . as I went along with them, they asked me when I thought the English would come . . . . Thus did they scoff at us. (R 358)

The new, individualistic, heroic self grows from Rowlandson's desire to be seen as Indian-like:

> the English army with new supplies . . . came to the Baquag river . . . that river should be impassible to the English. I can but admire to see the . . . heathen . . . go in great numbers over, but the English must stop. (R 358-359)

The situations are the same: a state of war and the need to cross the Baquag River. But added to the Indians' situation of war and suffering is the necessity of caring for their old and infirmed at all times and in all places. Just as Rowlandson reconfigures heroism in terms of Indianness, just as Hanson reconfigures motherhood in terms of Indianness, just as Dustan reconfigures American individualism in terms of Indianness, just as Hawkeye and later-day heros defend the normative community in terms of Indianness, so too does the Indian nurture the communal with individual courage:

> they made a stop, and chose some of their stoutest men, and sent them back to hold the English army . . . whilst the rest . . . marched on furiously, with their old, and with their young: some carried their old decrepit mothers, some carried one, and some another. (R 332-3)

Rowlandson does not fail to also make clear that the Indian suffers as much as she does, is no better off, in truth. King Philip attacks

Lancaster and other towns. But he is unable to directly confront either the English army or the army of Massachusetts and Connecticut and must constantly remove, as Rowlandson tells us by the ordering of her narrative. In The Fifth Remove, she says, "[t]he occasion (as I thought) of their moving at this time, was, the English army, it being near and following them: for they went, as if they had gone for their lives" (R 332). In The Sixth Remove she says that "they set their wigwams on fire, and went away" (R 334). "It was their usual manner to remove, when they had done any mischief, lest they should be found out" (R 354). "[L]ike Jehu, they marched on furiously" (R 332). Just as Dustan and Hanson also make note of the Indians' constant move away from an oppressive, normative, white society, American literature and film are rife with lone, heroic males, like Hawkeye, constantly on the move toward the wilderness, away from the normative society that would constrain them.

Dustan and Hanson further reveal the similarities between their situation and the Indian's. Like the Indian, they are cut off from their originary system of meaning and validation, forced "to reconcile the contradictions between" their changing world and their "traditional mythology of . . . social order."[10] Like the Indian, they can only stoically and desperately resist. Puritan and Quaker females and their Indian

captors furthermore share a pressure to change philosophies and at times even forms of religious worship. The Pequot and other New England nations were forced from their native religions as well as from their native regions. Dustan is forced to pray three times daily as a Catholic: "Indeed, these *idolaters* were, like the rest of their whiter brethren, *persecutors*" (*MCA* 635). So, too, is Hanson forced to confront a philosophy and way of life she fears.[11] The captive white woman, the Indian captor, and the emerging frontiers(man) of American literature and film are all threatened by a tenuous reality. They exist only within and only as a consequence of the area where the social meets and creates the antisocial: the frontier.

By again showing clips of old westerns or action films such as *Shane* and newer ones such as, say, *Blade Runner,* students can see that although the character of the lone hero is represented as stoic and fleetingly romantic, "he" is very much a permanent fixture in our literature. Furthermore, students see that in the hands of the early New England woman writer this self is <u>not</u> so tenuous as the male hero but is instead a lasting social force, is the creator of a thread in American literature. Cooper's 1826 Hawkeye possesses an "acuteness of organs, that would be scarcely conceivable to a man in a less natural state"; and, "[h]is . . . every

nerve and muscle appear[s] strung and indurated, by unremitted exposure and toil"; his attire is "a summer cap, of skins . . . . a knife in a girdle of wampum . . . . moccasins . . . a pair of buckskin leggings . . . . [a] pouch and horn . . . [and] a rifle of great length" (*The Last of the Mohicans* 328, 327, 29). He is the lone male who stoically, silently, naturally embodies self-conviction and self-sufficiency fighting for the white community's norms. Yet he must ever move away from normalizing society if he is to remain the heroic self. So, too, for example, are the police(men) in ABC's *NYPD Blue* whose effectiveness must remain hidden from the normal, the social authority. I ask my students to see this mobile, rootless, stoic, loner who succeeds because of a "natural," more "antisocial," skill as a direct descendent of the seventeenth-century women, the woman who does not move away but comes back to alter normative society by writing her narrative there.

I also ask my students how often any of these individuated selves are denied complete acceptance by the society they defend, the society whose values they fret over. How often is the individual, like the seventeenth-century woman, forced to reconcile inconsistencies between a changing world and an established belief system that seems no longer appropriate to the time and place?

It is glaringly ironic--it should be glaring to students--that the white Hawkeye, the frontiers(man) who is valued for his Indian ways, feels no kinship with those he emulates. It is especially ironic--sadly ironic--that few male characters in or authors and readers of American fiction are conscious of the depth of their reliance on the Indian and the woman who create the ideal now called masculine. For the female--not the male--gives voice to, starts the enigma of, performs the original of characters such as Daniel Boone and Davey Crockett and the Hollywood cowboy.

With my approach to the Puritan captivity narrative I believe students are not only more informed about early American women and Native Americans and their role in making a country. They also see more clearly the interconnections among the supposedly antisocial, such as the queer, the transvestite, the cross-dresser, and the heterosexist American hero. Students come to see that accepted norms are often at odds with what societies purport to value. How, I want them to question, can antisocial interpretations of gender, antisocial approaches to love, antisocial descriptions of the self be mental disorders or social disruptions if the most idealized American is born of such performances? Whatever students answer, they never again see the Puritans as boring or

lacking in individuality.

Notes

1. These early colonists did not consider themselves American; rather, they argued to be treated as Englishmen. See Richard Middleton, *Colonial America: A History, 1607-1760* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992): 157.

"America" of course includes Canada, Mexico, Central America, and South America. Still, however incorrectly, it is an identification claimed by United States residents in many ways: the canon of "American literature," being "an American." Perry Miller, in "Shaping of American Character," *Nature's Nation* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1967): 3, argues that one becomes an American.

2. Tara Fitzpatrick, in "The Figure of Captivity: The Cultural Work of the Puritan Captivity Narrative," *American Literary History* 3 (1991): 20, notes that the woman's captivity narrative works as a critique illuminating social contradictions in early New England and the need for a national identity to transcend them. I agree but add that the woman does specific things that the male captive does not and does them through her use of what is "Indian." Further citations of this work will be parenthetical.

3. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders,* vol. 4 (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1994) 493, 526, 530-1.

4. Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola and James Arthur Levernier, *The Indian Captivity Narrative 1550-1900* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993) 94.

5. Rowlandson's narrative is taken from Richard Slotkin and James K. Folsom, *So Dreadful a Judgment: Puritan Responses to King Philip's War, 1676-1677*, eds. Richard Slotkin and James K. Folsom (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1978): 315-369. Hannah Dustan's narrative is taken from Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702; rpt. Hartford, CT: Silas Andrus & Son, 1853): 634-6. Elizabeth Hanson's narrative is taken from Alden T. Vaughan and Edward W. Clark, eds., *Puritans Among the Indians: Accounts of Captivity and Redemption, 1676-1724* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1981) 229-244. The narratives of Quentin Stockwell and John Williams are also taken from Vaughan and Clark. All further citations of all these narratives will be cited parenthetically.

6. See Annette Kolodny, "Among the Indians: The Uses of Captivity," *The New York Times Book Review* (January 31, 1993): 26. Richard Slotkin, in *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan U P, 1973), notes that many seventeenth-century settlers "dismissed the few Indians present as having little claim to humanity and less to the land" (38).

7. Regarding the similarity of captivity narratives, see Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola and James Arthur Levernier, *The Indian Captivity Narrative, 1550-1900.* Derounian-Stodola and Levernier say that Rowlandson's narrative "contained all the structural elements that eventually characterized the captivity narrative" (94). Also see Christopher Castiglia's *Bound and Determined* for a discussion of how captivity narratives are dissimilar (16-40). Note, however, that I am not claiming uncritically "that captivity accounts conform to a consistent pattern" (Castiglia 24); I instead make a distinction between the narratives written by men and those by women, arguing that woman-authored captivity narratives perform, in various ways, antisocial combinations of "Indian" and "female."

8. See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993): 9. Sedgwick refers to "queer" as that which expresses itself.

I enlarge on Sedgwick's description of queer performance to include the Puritan woman whose writing expresses a desire to become more like the Native American--a naturally powerful individual. See also J. F. Buckley, *Desire, The Self, The Social Critic: The Rise of Queer Performance Within the Demise of Transcendentalism* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1997): 13-33. In the introduction to my book, I discuss how performance of "antisocial" desire can be a social critique that is an act in which the signs for differing selves are united in performance.

9. James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans,* eds. James A Sappenfield and E.N. Feltskog, *The Writings of James Fenimore Cooper,* ed. James Franklin Beard (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983). All further references to *The Last of the Mohicans* will be cited parenthetically from this text. It is important to note that up to and throughout the nineteenth century American literature almost always

genders the Romantic hero male.

Cooper wrote *The Leatherstocking Tales* in the following order: *The Pioneers* (1823), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), *The Prairie* (1827), *The Pathfinder* (1840), *The Deerslayer* (1841). However, the order of plot sequence following Natty Bumppo's life is *The Deerslayer* (1841), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), *The Pathfinder* (1840), *The Pioneers* (1823), *The Prairie* (1827).

10. See Slotkin and Folsom page 6 for a discussion of how "events are processed by the consciousness of [Puritan] historians and participant-reporters" during King Philip's War (5).

11. According to Slotkin and Folsom, in *So Dreadful A Judgment,* the Calvinist community of New England sponsored "Indian missions" in "an effort to acculturate the Indians to English ways as well as to convert them. . . . Whatever the proportion of missionary fervor to *realpolitik* in the motivation behind the missions, they constituted an incursion into the very heart of tribal or band organization" (27). The Puritans, for cultural and religious reasons, never forgot that much of Indian society "corresponded to their notions of Satan and witches." See also William S.

Simmons, "Cultural Bias in the New England Puritans' Perception of Indians," *William and Mary Quarterly* 38 (1981): 61-2, 71. This image took its most venomous form with the start of hostilities leading to King Philip's War. Once "the human symbol of the New World," the Indian was re-interpreted to symbolize the consequences of the Puritan community's sin, backsliding, and covenant breaking (See Slotkin and Folsom, 38).